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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000018

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY HOPES TO JUMPSTART SRI LANKA PEACE TALKS

REF: 05 OSLO 1263

Classified By: Pol/E Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Norway's Minister of International Development Erik Solheim will travel to Colombo January 23-26 in an effort to jumpstart peace talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Solheim and his team are quite concerned that the situation in Sri Lanka will deteriorate if there is no return to the negotiating table and if the "loosely upheld" ceasefire simply limps along. End summary.

Current Situation Dicey

2. (C) Norwegian MFA Special Advisor for Sri Lanka Lisa Golden shared with us Minister Solheim's concerns over the current impasse and state-of-play in Sri Lanka. The Norwegians are worried that instead of discussing substantive issues, the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) are jockeying over which side gets to dictate where to hold talks and who can participate. Norway offered to host talks in Oslo in August of 2005 (reftel), but the GSL refused to give the LTTE the international prestige Oslo would bestow. The issue of venue has now become larger than finding a suitable location as neither side wants to start negotiations at a location the other side dictated. Norway hopes that the offer to host the first round of discussions in Japan, with a second round in Norway, will be accepted so that discussions can commence.

Can Solheim Visit Jumpstart Talks ?

3. (C) Solheim is planning to visit Sri Lanka January 23 for three days of meetings with both the LTTE and the GSL. He tentatively plans to stop off and meet with his Indian counterparts on his way back to Norway. According to Golden, if the venue issue is still unresolved by the time Solheim visits, Solheim will push for resolution. The MFA is concerned that the longer the ceasefire continues to limp along "loosely upheld" with no real tangible progress, the easier it is for the more hard-line military commanders of the LTTE to move away from the ceasefire agreement and possibly to increase attacks.

4. (C) Norway believes that the LTTE does care about its international reputation, although to what degree is unclear, and therefore the threat of eliminating its funding sources continues to be one factor restraining them from more violence. Golden believes that if the EU names the LTTE as a terrorist group or if the U.S. aggressively pursues LTTE fundraising, the LTTE will feel the pressure. Interestingly, Norway announced on January 5 that it will no longer associate itself with EU terrorist listings, but rather will follow only UN listings. In explaining this decision, Foreign Minister Stoere said that Norway's association with EU listings "could cause difficulties for Norway in its role as a neutral facilitator in ongoing peace processes. Norway's role could become difficult if one of the parties involved was included on the EU list, and the opportunities for contact thus restricted."

Comment

5. (C) Norway remains committed to continuing its role as peace negotiator in Sri Lanka but is becoming increasingly pessimistic and fears that without a resumption of talks soon, the situation will deteriorate. Solheim would welcome any suggestions we have for how he might best help jumpstart the peace process during his January visit.

6. (C) Comment continued. Norway's new left-of-center government, as is clear from its decision to disassociate itself from the EU terrorist listing, is eager to carve out even a greater role as an international mediator. While Norway in no way wants this decision to be seen as it walking away from its international legal obligations to combat terrorism, it does want to maximize its ability to engage with groups some would define as terrorists, the LTTE being a prime example.

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